

BRITISH DIPLOMACY BEFORE 1914 IN THE LIGHT OF THE ARCHIVES

AMONG the manifold results of the war of 1914-1918 was the opening of the archives. The Bolsheviks led the way by the publication of secret treaties revealing the Imperialist ambitions of the Tsar and his allies. The Germans followed suit with the "Kautsky documents" on the outbreak of the war, and proceeded to unveil the story of German diplomacy from the creation of the Empire in the colossal enterprise known as *Die Grosse Politik*. The German editors⁵ hope that their example might be followed by the victorious Powers was speedily fulfilled. In 1924 Ramsay MacDonald decided to break the seals; and Professor Temperley and I were invited to select documents illustrating British statesmanship from 1898 to 1914. It was well understood that we should have a free hand. Not only did the Foreign Office make no difficulties, but it supported our resistance to attempts by more than one foreign Power to secure the omission of documents*. Had these attempts succeeded we should have resigned. In 1926 Poincaré announced the decision to publish the French documents between the wars of 1870 and 1914. The German and British undertakings are complete, but the French is still in progress. In 1930 the Austrians presented us with eleven thousand documents on the last thirty years of peace. In 1928 the Russians announced a large-scale revelation, beginning with the last three years of Nicholas II, and the first volume of the German translation appeared in 1930. Italy alone of the Great Powers keeps her treasures under lock and key.

Well over a hundred massive volumes of this

official material
 lie before us. So far as diplomacy is concerned,
 we know the
 mind and face of Europe during the generation
 before the
 World War as we know no other epoch in history.
 Verdicts on
 men, policies and events will continue to differ,
 for there is no
 absolute standard of political wisdom and
 virtue, but uncertainty as to what actually occurred is at an
 end. Bismarck
 used to say that true history could not be
 written from official
 documents, since the historian is not always
 aware what was in
 the minds of their authors; but it is equally
 true that history